

The Holy Spirit will come

Pastor Tim Melton

Have you ever felt that God had somehow forgotten or forsaken you? That the situation was too difficult and that God was not doing anything to help?

It is similar to the old poem, *Footprints*. In the poem the author describes a person who sees two sets of footprints in the sand. It is symbolic of his life. One set belongs to him and the other belongs to God. When life was good he sees two sets of footprints in the sand. When life was difficult he only sees one set of footprints. Bewildered by this observation he asks God, "Why did you leave me when life was so difficult? And God responds, "I never left you. It was in those days that I carried you."

In John 16 we see the words of Jesus as He seeks to give the Apostles this kind of perspective about what lies ahead. A life of following Christ would be difficult, but they would never be alone.

In John 15-16 we find an interesting conversation in which Jesus tells of the work and the importance of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was approaching the end of His ministry. He knew His time of suffering was near at hand. He knew that in a matter of hours the Apostles' entire world was going to seem to fall in on them. Jesus shared with the Apostles that He was going away. Jesus told the Apostles to expect difficulties, sufferings and persecution because of their faith in Him. It must have been a combination of overwhelming news. Jesus was leaving and persecution was to come.

Jesus was letting the Apostles know of the difficulties that lie ahead for them. The result would be similar to the response of William Tyndale, one of the first translators of scripture into the English language. His life was threatened as he sought to translate the Bible for the people, and yes, he would eventually be killed for his faith. Understanding the danger of his calling he said, "I never expected anything else." This was one of Jesus' motives, to set before the Apostles the cost that would be required by those who followed Him.

In John 16:7 we read these words of Jesus:

“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”

Jesus then surprises them with these words, *“I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go I will send Him to you.”* In the context of this warning of difficulties, Jesus told of the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles would not be left alone. The Holy Spirit would be their “Helper”. Earlier in the book of John the Holy Spirit was also described as the Advocate, the Teacher and the Witness. He, the person of the Holy Spirit, would be sent by Jesus in a similar way to how the Son had been sent by God, the Father. The Holy Spirit would be sent to bear witness about Jesus alongside the Apostles.

For the apostles it was such a blessing to be with Jesus every day, but Jesus told them it was only going to get better. Jesus had walked alongside the Apostles, now the Holy Spirit would come to live inside of them. It would truly be God drawing near to enable them to live the Christian life. The coming of the Spirit would be the fulfillment of Christ’s promise found in Matthew 28:20, *“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

In the Old Testament we see the Holy Spirit work in various ways, but even with these events the Spirit’s role at times is not clearly understood. It is in the New Testament that the role of the Holy Spirit comes into clearer form. One reason for that is because one of the central roles of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus and point people to Him. In the Old Testament, Christ had not yet come. Once Christ came, the Holy Spirit began to function clearly by testifying of Jesus.

“⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ concerning righteousness because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. (John 16:8-10)

In verse 8 Jesus tells how the Spirit *“will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment”*. This word convict can also be translated convince. It was used to describe the cross-examination of a witness during a trial, or to convince one of His guilt or error. That is one role of the Holy Spirit. He comes to reveal, convict and convince people of their sin and guilt. As the Spirit convinces a person of their sin, He then makes clear to them the righteousness of God and their deserving of judgment. This revelation comes only through the Holy Spirit.

We see this truth in the Jews at Jesus’ crucifixion. They believed themselves to be zealous for God, but yet they crucified the Son of God. They were not aware of their sin. At Pentecost the Jews heard the preaching of the Apostle Peter, and the Holy Spirit convicted them of their sin. Toward the end of his sermon Peter declared, *“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”* When they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, *‘Brothers, what shall we do?’* And Peter said to them, *‘Repent and be baptized’* (Acts 2:36-38). It was and is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin so that we might be broken over our guilt and turn to Jesus and find forgiveness.

We must remember this as we share the gospel with others. Yes, we need to be able to explain the reason for the hope that we have (1 Peter 3:15), and we should *“let our light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 5:16), but only the Holy Spirit can convict them of sin and convince them of their lostness and their need for salvation. We must pray and depend on the Holy Spirit as we seek for the salvation of others.

The Spirit reveals one’s sin in regards to unbelief, which is the underlying sin of all other sins. We sin because we don’t believe that Christ is who He says He is. We sin because we don’t believe what God has said to be true. We sin because we don’t believe that God is a good God who truly wants the best for us. We sin because we believe that we know better. We sin because we don’t really believe that He will discipline or that He is not powerful to be trusted. In so many ways our sin is rooted in unbelief.

The Spirit also convinces and reveals the righteousness of Christ. It is as we see the righteousness of Christ that even our best works pale in comparison and once again lead us to exalt Christ in His holiness and humble ourselves because of our depravity. As the pure brilliance of the righteousness of Christ is revealed to us the darkness of our sin can no longer be hidden or explained away. We are utterly convinced of our wickedness and sin. Even *“our righteous acts are like filthy rags”* because they come from an unclean heart (Isaiah 64:6).

The chief proofs of Christ’s righteousness were found in the resurrection and the ascension of Christ. Previously, Jesus had been seen by the religious Jews as a sinner (John 9:24), an “evil-doer” (John 18:30), and a “blasphemer” (Mark 14:64), who rightfully deserved death by crucifixion. But it was as Peter preached the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the ascension of Jesus that the Holy Spirit revealed and convinced the Jews of the righteousness of Christ. *“This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God”* (Acts 2:32).

It is Christ in His righteousness who now sits at the right hand of the throne of God the Father.

The Holy Spirit not only testifies to the righteousness of Christ, but convinces one of the truth of pending judgment for sin that awaits Satan and all of those who have not repented and believed in Jesus. This word “judged” in regards to Satan declares the judgment is already finalized. If judgment has even been passed upon Satan, “the prince of this world”, then no one can hope to get away with their sin. All mankind is faced with the fact that God is just, and that pending condemnation awaits all people because of their sin. Here we see a stark contrast. Satan, the prince of this world, has already been condemned and defeated by Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, who has now been given all authority in heaven and on earth and under the earth (Philippians 2:9-11; Matthew 28:18), now sits at the right hand of the throne of God. Those are the choices that are laid before every person. For the Apostles and all who come behind, this will serve as an encouragement as they persevere through persecution and trials. The truth is that Christ is victorious, and judgment awaits all who will not believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin.

“¹² I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own

authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”

At the times when these words of Christ were spoken, the Apostles were not ready to understand and believe them. The cross, the crucifixion and the ascension of Christ had not yet taken place, but the Holy Spirit would be their mentor, their tutor, their helper and their counselor, who would reveal the truths of God and Christ in the difficult days that lie ahead. The Spirit would lead them as they became the leaders of the early church and were used of God to lay the foundations for His kingdom work until Christ would return.

The Holy Spirit is also available to each of us as we stand in desperate need of understanding the truths of scripture. As we grow in Christ, faith and obedience, we are able to “bear more” of God’s truth. As we humble ourselves before the scriptures and the Holy Spirit’s teaching, He will guide us into true understanding and the will of God. As Christians this is our confidence. As the Word of God intersects with the Spirit of God in our lives, we will be guided into a proper understanding of the truths of God and into a more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

We find various verses in scripture that help us better understand this idea of being able to “bear” the truths of God. We see various people in scripture who were not ready to bear the truths of God. The Jews, numerous times in the Old and New Testament, were described as having eyes but not being able to see, and having ears but not being able to hear (Jeremiah 5:21). The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:2 writes to those in the church in Corinth of how, *“I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. In fact you still are not ready for you are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly?”* This sense of not being ready to bear the truths of scripture are directly connected to the condition of our hearts, our obedience and our preparedness to be “doers of God’s Word and not hearers only” (James 1:22).

In Acts 17 we see the story of the Bereans who were ready to bear the truths of God. They listened to Paul’s teaching and would immediately go to scripture to verify that what He had taught was true. This is similar to what we read in Jeremiah 29:13, *“You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all of your heart.”* They were hungry to understand, believe and obey God’s truths.

Yes, the Holy Spirit has been given to guide us into all truth, but we must be ready to receive this truth from Him. As we open the scriptures, may we pray to the Spirit to reveal God’s truth to us. May we ask God to grant us a hunger for His Word. May we plead for a transformed heart to obey.

“¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

The Spirit will glorify Jesus. He will take the things of the Father, which belong to Christ, and reveal them to the followers of Christ. What the Holy Spirit delights to do above everything else is to glorify Jesus Christ. On the human level we see something similar in the life of John the Baptist in John 3:30. John the Baptist had had a very fruitful ministry. In Mark 1:5 it reads, *“And all the country of Judea and all*

Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.” He could have chosen the way of pride and self-promotion, but instead, when Jesus begins His public ministry and the people start to follow Jesus, John the Baptist responds with these words about Jesus, *“He must increase, but I must decrease.”* He understood His role to prepare the way for Jesus Christ, and once Jesus came he gladly stepped aside and pointed everyone to Christ.

As followers of Christ we too must live in this way. Last Sunday we talked about the supremacy of Christ. He is above all things. His name is higher than any other name. He is our Savior and Lord. He is God in the flesh. *“There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). As Christians we must not and we cannot seek to make a name for ourselves while also making a name for Jesus Christ. It is impossible to glorify God and ourselves at the same time.

I know that the world teaches us to impress, and prove ourselves, and draw attention to ourselves by the way we look, the way we work and the way that we succeed, but the way of Christ is the exact opposite. We are called to live in such a way that our lives provoke questions about Jesus. That there will be something about our lives that is so supernatural that the glory goes beyond us and causes people to seek a larger explanation for our servant’s heart, our humility, our peace, our generosity, our love, our joy, our faith, the way we love our enemies, and the way we thrive even in adversity.

It would be similar to going to the Prado to look at a world-class art exhibit, or to Bernabéu to watch a game between Real Madrid and Barça. Or visiting the Cathedral in the city center. You would never go in to see a great event or exhibition and stand in amazement over the type of spotlights they were using. That would not even make sense. The lights are not there for their own glory. They are there to illumine that which is most remarkable and noteworthy.

This is the Holy Spirit’s role as well. He seeks to reveal the greatness of Christ. Yes, scripture refers to Him as the Revealer of Truth, the Spirit of God, the Teacher, the Witness, the Convicter of Sin, the Intercessor, the Indweller of Believers, a Guide, the Comforter, the Counselor, Our Helper, Our Advocate, and a Seal on the lives of Believers that we are truly His. However, in the midst of all these functions, His overarching purpose and delight is to point people towards Jesus. That is what the Spirit does.

Christ, in the flesh, is not standing in our midst. He will return one day for His people, but for now He is not physically with us. Now the Spirit of Christ abides within each of us. Christ in the flesh was unable to be in all places at all times, but the Holy Spirit now dwells in each person who has repented and believed in Jesus Christ. We have been born again. We have passed from death to life. We have been given a new nature and have become children of God. As we go out from this place today and travel to different parts of the city, the presence of God that dwells within us will go with us. In Him we will carry with us all the resources of God that are found in Christ Jesus. All of the functions and ministries of Jesus are continued in our lives because through the Holy Spirit we are in Christ and Christ is in us.

It must have been a joy to live at the time of Christ and walk alongside Christ on a daily basis, but we live in an even more advantageous time than they. In the words of Christ, *“I tell you the truth: it is to your*

advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7).

We are a truly blessed people. The Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells in us. We are not alone. We are not orphans. We are not lost, not defeated, not forgotten and not beyond hope. For those of us who have repented of our sin and believed in Jesus Christ, we are now children of the Most High God, whose Spirit lives within us. In the Spirit we have received a Helper who will accompany us as we seek to glorify Jesus Christ, regardless what life brings our way.

Let me close with this story to illustrate the point.

Their names were Caleb and Joy Stephens. They were in their lower 30s and had been married for a couple of years when she was stricken by a rare illness that left her blind. It was not what they had planned for when they got married, but they both were committed to making the most of it.

They learned new ways to live, and Joy’s company even let her keep her job. It was difficult learning about braille, the use of a walking stick, and the use of a computer, but gradually she learned what she had to. This also included having to learn about transportation. They lived in a big city and had no car.

That first week Caleb would come with her. They would walk from their apartment to the bus stop. They would go 8 stops and then Joy would exit and make her way into the building and up to her office. Caleb spoke with the bus drivers so they would understand the situation and be able to “watch out for” Joy during her daily journey. They followed this same schedule each day that first week. She did well, but the next Monday would be the real test.

The next Monday was Joy’s first day on her own. She found her way to the bus stop. She got on the correct bus and exited after 8 stops. She found her building and her office just as they had practiced. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. She had done it!

As she was about to exit the bus on Friday the bus driver said to her, “Your husband must really love you”. A little confused she asked, “Why do you say that?” He answered, “You haven’t known it, but every day this week he has followed our bus on his bicycle. He has watched to make sure that you got on the right bus and got off at the right stop. He has been waiting for you at your bus stop every day after work. He has been there for you the whole time, even though you did not realize it. You were never out of his sight, even though he was never in yours.”

The same is true of the Holy Spirit. He dwells in us and we will always be in His presence. This is what God has provided for His children. This is our great benefit and proof of Salvation. In the words of Christ, *“I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7).*

So, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).